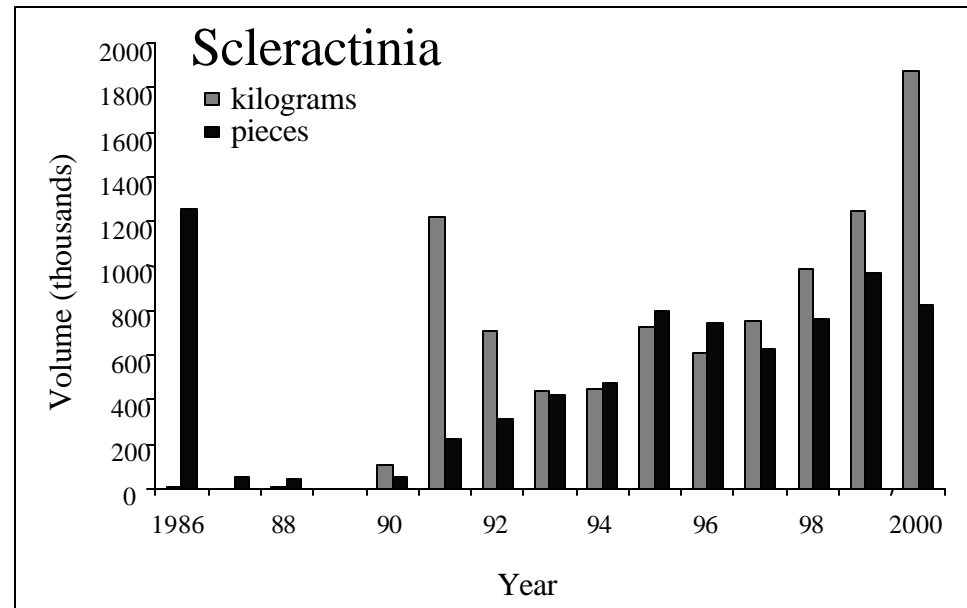
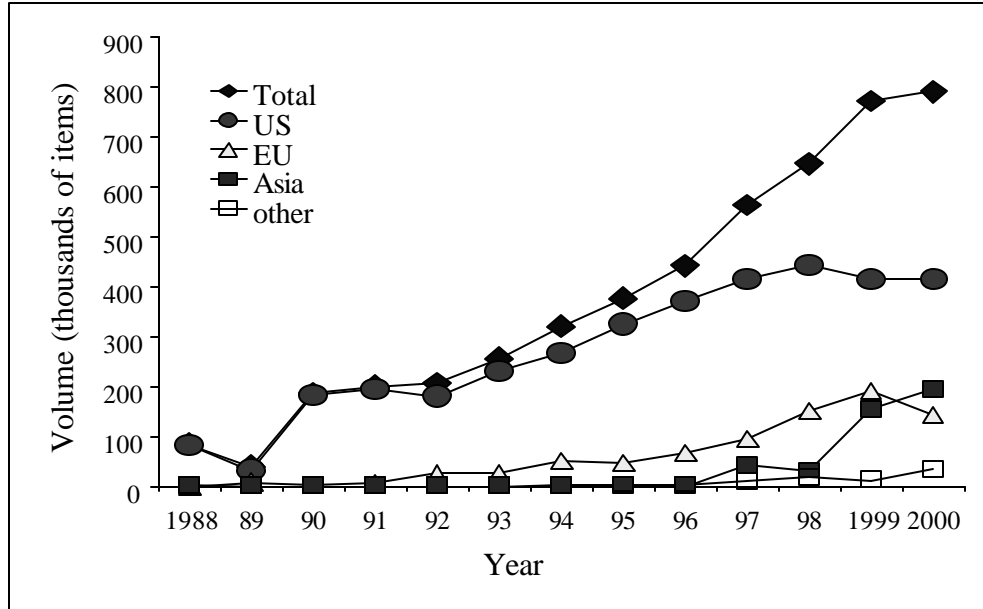


Live Coral in International Trade



Many coral reef species and resources are harvested globally for commercial purposes, to supply international markets with food, aquarium organisms, live reef fish markets, curios, jewelry, pharmaceuticals and traditional medicines. This includes hundreds of thousands of kilograms of hard corals and live rock, and over 1000 different coral reef fishes and invertebrates that are removed from coral reefs every year (Figure 1 and 2). During the 1990's, the United States was consistently the world's largest importer of ornamental coral reef species, including 60-80% of the live coral and 95% of the "live rock" or reef substratum, and an estimated 50% of all live reef fish. Most coral comes from the Indo-Pacific, with minimal trade in Caribbean corals. Sources of coral include 1) Indonesia, which is the world's largest source of live coral; 2) Fiji, the largest supplier of live rock and also a source of substantial amounts of live and dead coral; 3) Vietnam, a major source of coral skeletons; and 4) a number other countries in the South Pacific and southeast Asia. The Philippines and Indonesia provide most reef fish for aquaria, although an estimated 45 countries supply 14-30 million reef fish to international markets each year overall.

International trade in ornamental coral reef species has been increasing at a rate of about 10-20% per year since 1990. Many coral reef species continue to be harvested using destructive fishing practices, such as the use of poisons to capture live reef fish for aquaria and live fish markets. In many cases, the local and regional intensity of collection appears to be occurring at unsustainable levels, and management mechanisms need to be implemented to ensure sustainable harvest. While the U.S. is currently the world's largest importer of ornamental reef species, the collection of stony corals is strictly limited or prohibited in most of its federal, state and territorial waters. Coral reef fishes are also collected for the aquarium trade in U.S. waters, however cyanide is not used and management plans exist or are under development in most locations.

Through the U.S. Coral Reef Task Force, the U.S. is increasing efforts to identify, collect and analyze data on the imports of coral reef species, and is also providing recommendations on strategies for sustainable harvest to those countries involved in global export. The U.S. is working with non-government organizations such as the Marine Aquarium Council (MAC) to promote multi-stakeholder standards for best harvest, handling and transport practices and third-party certification, and the International Marinelife Alliance to eliminate destructive fishing practices. The U.S. also participates in a number of International Fora to promote sustainable trade. For instance, the U.S. is working with other parties to the Convention on the International Trade in Endangered Species of Wild Fauna and Flora (CITES) to improve reporting requirements for CITES-listed species and to evaluate whether other coral reef species could benefit through a CITES listing.

The development of sustainable management strategies requires financial and technical support of industry, scientists and governments in exporting and importing countries; commitment of local fishers to protect the resource; and demand by the hobbyist and suppliers for sustainably and environmentally-friendly harvested coral reef species. Reducing threats to coral reefs and implementation of management strategies for sustainable harvest are necessary to promote economic stability, food security and long-term environmental benefits from coral reefs world-wide, especially in developing countries that rely on coral reef resources